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LACUNAE

Elderly playgrounds

The University of Lapland has been researching how to make activity more playful and pleasurable, and is convinced that elderly people would benefit from joining in with the children in the local park. A team at Rovaniemi Polytechnic studied one group of 40 people, aged between 65 and 81, and found there were significant improvements in balance, speed and coordination after just three months of larking about on the climbing frames and play equipment. Most of the subject group said they felt better mentally because of the exercise and empowered when they managed to overcome a problematic piece of equipment. Many said they were initially worried about appearing foolish, but that seemed to disappear fairly quickly. Irmelin Roskila, 63, said she had started out feeling like "an elephant walking on a narrow beam". Three months later her lap time had gone down from more than a minute to 17 seconds. "Even in everyday situations when I'm walking around I will now try out playground equipment. It has opened up new possibilities, not just physically. I wish others could see this," said Irmelin. And this is one reason why the Finnish playground manufacturer Lappset is now selling the idea of "3 generational play". All of its playgrounds are to be built to be used by all ages and it is seeking to transform our view of who should use a playground.

Contributed by Ian Scott